

December 16, 1999

Bruce Babbitt, Secretary
Department of the Interior
18th and C Streets NW
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Secretary Babbitt,

I enjoyed speaking with you yesterday about a possible partnership between the CALFED levee maintenance and habitat restoration programs and the Corps' extensive dredging operations in San Francisco Bay. You mentioned your work with the Corps in several areas. I suggest that this is an area that could reap significant benefits. Several months ago, as a staff member for Save The Bay, I worked on the attached report examining the potential to use clean Bay dredged material both to maintain Delta levees and to restore Delta habitat. I am writing to request that you support a CALFED investigation regarding this opportunity.

There are two major obstacles to Delta reuse of Bay material – cost and salinity. Save The Bay's investigation suggests that there are several potential solutions to these legitimate concerns. A cost-sharing partnership among the Corps, Bay Area dredgers and CALFED presents a tremendous opportunity to make Delta reuse affordable. The attached report addresses this issue in some detail. We believe that Delta reuse is cost-competitive with other dredged material disposal options already in use.

The second obstacle to such reuse is the concern that importing Bay mud to the Delta could increase the salinity of Delta waters. Unfortunately, the attached report – thin though it is – is the most thorough examination of this issue to date. There are several salinity management options that could significantly reduce salinity concerns, while assisting in ecosystem restoration and in efforts to prevent a catastrophic failure in Delta levees (and a much greater salinity problem).

Put simply, CALFED is looking for sediment to restore levees and habitat. The Long Term Management Strategy (LTMS) for Bay dredging, on the other hand, is trying to determine how best to dispose of 200 million cubic yards of dredged sediment in the coming 50 years. It is a tragedy that no effort has gone into investigating the potential of such an obvious partnership. I believe that the Corps, at least at the local level, is supportive of further investigation. I also spoke with Joe Westphal and am writing to him as well. Unfortunately, however, CALFED has not yet turned it's attention to this issue. The CALFED staff is supportive, but CALFED managers have been distracted by a variety of water policy issues.

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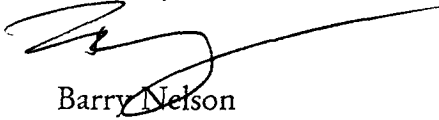
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We have all been so focused on the B2 and surface storage debates that we lose sight of other remarkable opportunities in CALFED. I will call early in the New Year to see if you would help persuade CALFED to investigate this opportunity. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Barry Nelson', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Barry Nelson
Senior Policy Analyst